

Division of Naval History
Ships' Histories Section
Navy Department

HISTORY OF USS COMFORT (AH 6)

Designed to transport sick and wounded from battle zones with as much comfort and care as would be given in a fully-equipped shore hospital, the USS COMFORT was the first hospital ship to be manned jointly by Army and Navy personnel.

The Navy crew was responsible for the ship herself during World War II, while the Army provided the hospital personnel. The USS COMFORT was the first ship to use such a division of labor.

Built by the Consolidated Steel Corporation of Wilmington, California, the ship was acquired on 17 March 1943 and put in commission at San Pedro, California, on 5 May 1944, under the command of Commander Harold F. Fultz, USN. Lieutenant Colonel Joseph F. Linsman, USA, was in command of the hospital.

The ship was the second hospital ship to bear the name. The first USS COMFORT was acquired by the Navy in 1917 and served as (AH 3) until 1925, when she was disposed of by sale.

After once being forced back into port by engine trouble, the USS COMFORT got underway on 21 June 1944, bound for Brisbane, Australia. From Brisbane the ship sailed to Hollandia, New Guinea area, which lasted until the ship received orders to proceed to a secret rendezvous to operate in support of the invasion of the Philippines.

Arriving at a point 150 miles off Leyte Gulf on 22 October, the ship began steering a slow circular course, awaiting further orders. Unidentified aircraft attacked her during the early morning of the 24th, dropping three bombs without causing any damage. Under the protection of a destroyer, the ship then steamed to a new rendezvous point 350 miles southeast of Leyte. After three days spent circling this position, the ship set course for Leyte on 28 October. Men wounded in the assault on Leyte began coming aboard at about 1400 the next day, and by 1740 the ship was underway with a full load of patients. Despite a typhoon, she continued to Hollandia and disembarked the wounded before steaming to Palau, returning to Leyte for another group of patients on 16 November.

Upon her return to Hollandia, the ship received orders to evacuate patients to the United States. She moored in San Pedro, California on 21 December and disembarked 700 patients to various hospitals in the area before beginning an 18-day period of repairs and loading. On 8 January 1945 she departed for Leyte via Eniwetok and Kossol Passage.

Patients were brought aboard on 31 January and evacuated to Hollandia. Another round trip ended in Hollandia on 6 February and six days later the ship sailed for Subic Bay and Lingayen Gulf. Unloading medical supplies and embarking patients, she again steamed south to Hollandia, where she received orders to sail for Ulithi, staging area for the invasion of Okinawa.

The ship arrived off Okinawa on 2 April 1945, one day after the initial landings. During the next week she stood off the beaches each day, retiring

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at night to the comparative safety of the open sea. Six enemy planes attacked the formation on 6 April, as the COMFORT was loading patients. The surrounding ships disposed of all six, knocking down one only 50 yards from the bow of the hospital ship. Two days later a plane dropped three bombs which straddled the ship but caused no damage. The plane was later identified as one from the USS ENTERPRISE. Soon thereafter a destroyer was sent out for protection.

On the 9th the ship sailed for Guam, where Commander Fultz was relieved by Commander A. Tooker, USNR, as commanding officer. By 23 April the ship was again off Okinawa, taking aboard wounded. She came under fire from an enemy shore battery on the 27th and under a general air raid through the night and until dawn on the 28th, but escaped damage. She then began her retirement toward Guam.

When the ship was 30 miles away from the contested island, a Japanese suicide plane, ignoring the plain markings which all hospital ships carry, crashed into the ship, penetrating two decks. The plane struck the surgery room, which was then filled with patients, nurses, doctors, and men. The resulting explosion killed 28 persons, including six nurses, and wounded 48 others. All the surgical and X-ray equipment were destroyed, along with damage to several other installations. The ship was able to continue on into Guam under her own power, however, and arrived on 3 May, where a mass funeral was held for those killed in the wanton attack.

After temporary repairs had been made, the ship sailed for the United States, arriving at Terminal Island, California on 28 May. While she was in the yard, Lieutenant Colonel S. J. Ritchey took command of the hospital.

When her repairs were complete, the ship sailed on 12 August for Subic Bay, Luzon, carrying 500 passenger nurses. Upon her arrival, she took up duty as a station hospital.

USS COMFORT earned two Battle Stars on the Asiatic-Pacific Area Service Medal for participating in the following operations:

1 Star/ Leyte Landings ----- 24 October 1944

1 Star/ Assault and Occupation of Okinawa Gunto ----- 2 - 28 April 1945.

She also earned the Navy Occupation Service Medal, Asia, for the periods 12 October - 18 November 1945 and 27 January - 17 February 1946.

After two short tours of occupation duty, the ship was disposed of by transfer to another government activity in April, 1946.

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STATISTICS

OVERALL LENGTH	416 feet
BEAM	60 feet
SPEED	15 knots
DISPLACEMENT	6000 tons
CREW	20 officers 213 men

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Stencilled: 21 October 1953